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FAMILY AND SIB

By ROBERT H. LOWIE

ETHNOLOGISTS in the United States are agreed that the North American peoples of crudest culture are loosely organized, with the family as the basic unit; that tribes definitely organized into sibs (Morgan's gentes, clans of English writers) represent a higher cultural plane at which, however, the influence of the family is clearly discernible; that accordingly the sib is a later, superimposed product, not the invariable predecessor of the family. It remains to define the mechanism by which such a transformation might have been effected.

The sib, like the family, is a kinship group. It is at once more and less inclusive than the rival unit. On the one hand, it excludes one half of the blood-kindred—the father's side of the family in matronymic, the mother's side in patronymic societies. On the other hand, it admits on equal terms all kindred of the favored side regardless of degree and even individuals considered blood-relatives merely through legal fiction, whence the rule of sib exogamy. The sib normally embraces not merely the descendants through females of an ancestress, or through males of an ancestor, but several distinct lines of descent, which are only theoretically conceived as a single line. This particular form of inclusiveness, based on adoption, coalescence of ceremonial units, or what not, is too familiar a phenomenon to present any great difficulty to our comprehension. The real problem lies in the origin of what Dr. Goldenweiser calls the maternal and the paternal family pattern rather than in the expansion of these unilateral bodies of kindred to form larger groups of the same type and in theory identical with them.

It is my purpose to show that the characteristic features of the sib organization are in some measure prefigured among sibless tribes; that certain usages may bring about an alignment of kin such as occurs in sib systems; that the sib is in fact merely a group of kindred thus segregated and defined by a distinctive name.

In the interests of clearness it is well to define at the outset the relation of my present position to that assumed in previous publications.¹ Elsewhere I argued that the "Dakota" principle of classifying kin is logically and actually associated with sib systems and lacking in sibless tribes. Accordingly I concluded that the sib was the antecedent condition for the development of the Dakota type of relationship nomenclature. At present I should say that while the empirical correlation holds true the causal relations are to be reversed; generally speaking, a particular grouping of kin resulted in a sib system, though a fully established sib organization can and did in turn influence the nomenclature of kin.

In comparing the nomenclatures of sibless and of definitely organized tribes, we often find two characteristic differences. The former either fail to distinguish paternal and maternal relatives or they fail to merge collateral and lineal kin, or both. For example, the Coast Salish have a single term for paternal and maternal uncles, but distinguish children from all nephews and nieces. However, the terminologies of these peoples are by no means uniform and in many of them we can detect foreshadowings of the Dakota principle.

The most obvious of these is the classification not merely of kindred but of unrelated tribesmen as well, nay sometimes even of strangers, according to age. Dr. Karl von den Steinen was called elder brother by the Bakairí, maternal uncle by the Mehinakú.² That is to say, approximate age-mates are classed together except so far as they are differentiated by sex. This principle may be designated as Hawaiian, since it is most consistently followed by the Hawaiians and related Polynesians and Micronesians. Elsewhere, however, we do find suggestions of Hawaiian classification among loosely organized peoples. Perhaps the most common extension occurs in the second ascending generation, any venerable individual being addressed as a grandparent. To cite non-American

¹ Exogamy and the Classificatory Systems of Relationship (*American Anthropologist*, N. S., vol. 17, 1915, pp. 223-239); *Culture and Ethnology* (New York, 1917), chapter v.

² K. von den Steinen, *Unter den Naturvölkern Zentral-Brasiliens*, 2te Aufl. (Berlin, 1897), p. 286.

examples, this is recorded for the Hottentot,¹ and the Chukchi draw no distinction between grandfather and great-uncle, grandmother and great-aunt.² The Chukchi nomenclature reveals other approximations to the Hawaiian pattern. There is no distinction between maternal and paternal uncles or aunts, and even those once removed are designated by the same terms. On the other hand, the Chukchi differ fundamentally from tribes following either the Hawaiian or the Dakota plan in rigidly separating the father from all uncles, the mother from all aunts.

In North America there are interesting analogies. The Wind River Shoshoni, I found, class all cousins with brothers and sisters, conforming to that extent wholly to the Hawaiian scheme; and Sapir notes the same feature for the Nootka. With the Hupa all women of the second ascending generation are grandmothers, all the old men grandfathers, all the children born in the same house one another's siblings.³ The Coast Salish go at least equally far. Here not only are great-uncles and grandfathers classed together and reciprocally call their own and their siblings' grandchildren by a common term, but all cousins are grouped with brothers and sisters, while a single term denotes father's and mother's siblings. One step further and in the first ascending generation, too, they would follow the Hawaiian principle; the step, however, is not taken since uncles and aunts remain differentiated from parents.⁴

Such extensions of terms as have been cited hardly require special psychological explanation since they are not unfamiliar among ourselves. Among primitive tribes there exists the additional stimulus of a widespread and intense aversion to the use of personal names. But the tendency to designate individuals by a common term may have far greater than merely terminological significance. Because primitive peoples attach an extraordinary importance to names the more remote cousin who is *called* cousin or sister may be-

¹ L. Schultze, *Aus Namaland und Kalahari* (Jena, 1907), p. 300.

² Waldemar Bogoras, The Chukchee, *Memoirs, American Museum of Natural History* (Leiden, 1909), p. 538.

³ P. E. Goddard, Life and Culture of the Hupa, *University of California Publications in American Archeology and Ethnology*, vol. 1 (Berkeley), p. 58.

⁴ Franz Boas, *Report Sixtieth Meeting, British Association for the Advancement of Science*, 1890, p. 688 seq.

come more closely related in thought and marriage may be tabooed regardless of degree of propinquity. This we are specifically told in the case of the Paviotso.¹ Among the Nez Percé even third cousins were not allowed to marry² and the union of second cousins roused ridicule in Thompson River communities.³ I conjecture that these are analogous cases.

However the merging of remote and near collateral kin, or even of collateral and lineal lines of descent, does not suffice to pave the way for a sib organization; in addition to inclusiveness there must be dichotomy, that is, the extensions must be unilateral not Hawaiian. Although our knowledge of the social organization of sibless tribes remains sadly inadequate, a number of cases can be presented in which there is definite bifurcation of blood-kindred. For the present a few illustrations must suffice; they are selected from four tribes typical of the great sibless area and representing distinct linguistic stocks.

CHINOOK⁴

mā'ma, -*ma*, *am*, father
-*motx*, father's brother
-*la*, mother's brother

-*naa*, -*a*, mother
-*k!ōtcxa*, mother's sister
-*lak*, father's sister

PAVIOTSO⁵

na, father
hai'i, father's brother
alsi, mother's brother

pia, mother
pidu'u, mother's sister
pahwa, father's sister

POMO⁶

e, *harik*, father
keh, father's brother
tsets, mother's brother

te, *nik*, mother
tuls, mother's elder sister
sheh, mother's younger sister
weh, father's sister

¹ S. Hopkins, *Life among the Piutes* (Boston, 1883), p. 45.

² H. J. Spinden, *The Nez Percé Indians* (*Memoirs, American Anthropological Association*, vol. II, part 3, 1908), p. 250.

³ James Teit, *The Thompson Indians of British Columbia* (*Memoirs, American Museum of Natural History*, vol. I, 1900), p. 325.

⁴ Franz Boas, *American Anthropologist*, N. S., 6, 1904, p. 135.

⁵ A. L. Kroeber, *California Kinship Systems*, *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology*, vol. 12, 1917, p. 359.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 370 f.

OKANAGAN¹

læ'ē'u (m. sp.), father
mistm (w. sp.), father
sm'ē'elt, father's brother
sisi', mother's brother

sk'ō'i (m. sp.), mother
tōm (w. sp.), mother
swāwa'sā, mother's sister
sk'ō'koi, father's sister

Such dichotomy of kin as is here indicated is exactly what might be expected under that family organization which American students regard as prior to a sib system, for since the parents belong to different families their relatives are logically enough distinguished from one another.

Let us now assume that the bifurcating and the merging tendency as hitherto expounded unite. Then we shall have a terminology in which all the mother's female kindred belonging to her generation will be classed with the mother's sister, all of her male kindred in that generation are treated as mother's brothers, while corresponding classification is given to the father's relatives. In that generation we shall have an alignment anticipating that of the Dakota type, from which it differs solely in the distinction maintained between parent and parent's sibling of the same sex.

What happens, however, in the speaker's generation? Corresponding to the four uncle-aunt terms we might logically expect an equal number of cousin terms, or even twice as many through sex discrimination. As a matter of fact, the classification of cousins follows quite different principles. In some nomenclatures of sibless tribes, *e. g.*, the Paviotso and Shoshoni, the Hawaiian principle is applied and all cousins are brothers and sisters. Among the Coast Salish we find the same grouping but also a specific term for cousin. I assume—and this is the most hypothetical feature of my scheme—that at the stage preceding the evolution of the sib the natives had specific terms for brother and sister, while all other relatives of that generation were lumped together under a single term except so far as they were differentiated according to sex. This would yield a grouping somewhat similar to that in the first ascending generation since the members of the immediate family would be segregated from more remote kin. On the other hand, this classifica-

¹ Franz Boas, *Report 60th Meeting, British Association for the Advancement of Science*, 1890, p. 691.

tion would differ from that characteristic of most tribes with a sib organization. For one of the essential features of their nomenclatures lies in the dichotomy of cousins according to the likeness or unlikeness of the sex of the parents through whom the relationship is established. In perhaps the most common variety of the Dakota scheme parallel cousins are brothers and sisters, cross-cousins are designated by a distinct cousin term.

It is essential to point out that no perfectly satisfactory explanation of this classification has been given except on Tylor's hypothesis that it originated in a moiety organization.¹ The hypothesis that parallel cousins are simply moiety mates admirably accounts for the grouping but does not cover the facts of distribution, since the division into parallel and cross-cousins is often found with a multiple sib system.² This, however, in turn fails to account for the classification. If there are only two sibs in a tribe (or, prior to sibs, only two intermarrying families); cross-cousins are in one moiety and parallel cousins in the other, as Tylor pointed out. But if there are five, the condition is very different. Assuming maternal descent, the children of sisters will indeed belong to the same social unit but the children of brothers need not; one may marry into group *b*, the other into group *c*, and their children will belong to their respective mothers' sibs.

Now I assume that upon tribes bifurcating but merging relatives unilaterally in the manner described above, there are superimposed two extremely widespread customs, the levirate and the sororate. The terminological effects of these usages have been amply discussed by Sapir,³ though not quite adequately as regards cousin nomenclature. One obvious result is to obliterate the distinction between father and father's brother, mother and mother's sister. In short, the Chinook and other terminologies cited (p. 31) come to conform to the Dakota principle in the first ascending generation. Since father's brother and mother's sister become

¹ E. Tylor, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. XVIII, 1889, p. 264.

² Cross-cousin marriage, which seems closely connected with a dual organization, also has a distribution far too limited to account for the data.

³ E. Sapir, *Terms of Relationship and the Levirate*, *American Anthropologist*, N. S., vol. 18, 1916, pp. 327-337.

parents, their children become siblings, which accounts for the grouping together of parallel cousins. But it is not clear why father's sister's and mother's brother's child so often remain undistinguished. If, however, all cousins have previously received a common designation on the basis of generation, being differentiated only from those contemporaries who form part of the narrow family circle, as I assume, then the effect of the levirate and sororate is to raise parallel cousins to the status of siblings, while cross-cousins remain in the general class of contemporaries.

I offer this suggestion not as a substitute for Tylor's interpretation but as supplementary to it; it is designed to cover those cases in which parallel cousins cannot be classed together as members of one moiety and cross-cousins of the other for the simple reason that no dual organization exists, either in a fully developed or nascent form.

The relation of these marriage customs to social organization merits some additional consideration. As to their significance I indorse whole-heartedly Tylor's interpretation that the levirate reflects a matrimonial compact not between individuals but between families; and that for lack of actual brothers more remote male relatives are substituted.¹ Corresponding views of course apply to the sororate. Wherever our data are sufficiently explicit, they seem to corroborate Tylor's theory. For example, the Shasta purchase wives and a man is aided in the transaction by his brothers and relatives; accordingly it is natural that they should lay claim to the widow. On the other hand, a widower or the husband of a barren woman might take as his second spouse one of his wife's unmarried sisters or cousins.² Thompson River Indian practice closely conforms to that of the Shasta; more particularly a man held an incontestable claim to his brother's widow.³

In a discussion of Dr. Sapir's paper on the levirate⁴ I raised certain difficulties, some of which would militate no less against the

¹ Tylor, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

² Roland B. Dixon, The Shasta, *Bulletin, American Museum of Natural History*, 1907, vol. xvii, p. 463 f.

³ James Teit, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

⁴ R. H. Lowie, *Culture and Ethnology*, pp. 144-150.

position I now assign to these usages than against Dr. Sapir's explanation of kinship nomenclatures. Probably the most important of these is a chronological one: if the levirate and the sororate developed subsequently to the sibs they could not of course give rise to that classification of kin which I now regard as underlying the sib. Now it is true that since Tylor no one has taken the trouble to ascertain the precise distribution of either custom and his concrete data are apparently lost. But in the light of my reading I am tempted to regard his result—a forty per cent. distribution of the levirate among primitive tribes—as far below the figure that would be established by a count today. This seems certain for North America; and here we find the interesting result that levirate and sororate are found jointly almost throughout the great sibless area—among the Salish of British Columbia, in our Pacific states, and the Great Basin. They are thus characteristic of the simpler sibless cultures, but they also appear commonly on a higher level with the sib system. The inference is warranted that they are traits preceding the sib organization and in a manner preparing the way for it.

This, to be sure, would not apply to the Pueblo area, where neither levirate nor sororate is in vogue. But the best-known tribes of this region differ rather markedly in their nomenclature from the Dakota norm, though in a manner not inconsistent with the principles I have outlined above. The Zuñi group cousins of both sides as siblings, though applying peculiar notions in point of seniority which may here be disregarded.¹ This is quite intelligible, of course, on the principle of generations. With the Hopi the two kinds of cross-cousins are differentiated (see below), so that the problem as to their classification does not arise in the usual form (p. 34). But what of the Zuñi and Hopi classification of uncles and aunts? Here, too, I can see no difficulty. Though the levirate, *e. g.*, supplies an excellent specific reason for identifying father's brother and father while differentiating them from the mother's brother, the joint force of the more general bifurcation and generation factors

¹ A. L. Kroeber, "Zuñi Kin and Clan," *Anthropological Papers, American Museum of Natural History*, vol. 18, part 2, p. 58.

is adequate to produce the same result. Since father's brothers thus came to be reckoned as fathers, and mother's sisters as mothers, the Hopi classification of parallel cousins as siblings follows: the children of those I call my parents must be my brothers and sisters.

The classification of parallel cousins, however, involves a fundamental obstacle to any theory that would derive the sibs from an earlier system of kinship nomenclature. As Morgan himself pointed out, the status of sibling is not coterminous with that of sib fellow. In a matrilineal society only the children of sisters, not of brothers, belong to the same social unit, yet *all* parallel cousins are addressed as brothers and sisters.¹ If we assume that the conditions described above gave rise to the terminology that normally accompanies a sib organization, then why were some of the brothers and sisters taken into the sib and others discarded?

In attempting to answer this question I desire at the outset to emphasize my belief in a multiple origin of the sib idea; even in North America I hold that there have been several centers of distribution. For one thing, I am strongly impressed with the enormous variability of the sib concept. Secondly, the generalized sib idea—unilateral descent—is not, as Morgan would have it, an abstruse quasi-metaphysical notion, but one that quite naturally develops from certain cultural features. These features, moreover, may favor either patrilineal or matrilineal descent; hence I see no reason why either father-sibs (*gentes*) or mother-sibs (*clans*) should not have arisen directly from a loose organization instead of either having to evolve out of the other, though of course I do not reject the possibility of such a transformation.

To turn to the problem of parallel cousins. Sibless communities have often clear-cut regulations tending to establish definite lines of descent. The Shasta and the Thompson River Indians recognized individual ownership of fishing stations with patrilineal descent of the title to them.² Such possessions might not loom large enough in the tribal consciousness to lead to significant consequences, they might even be outweighed by other considerations

¹ Lewis H. Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity* (Washington, 1871), p. 475 f.

² James Teit, *op. cit.*, p. 293 f.; Dixon, *op. cit.*, p. 452.

stressing the maternal lines of descent. It is quite different when economic privileges of some consequence are involved or when there is a definite rule determining the residence of a couple after marriage, or where both these factors coöperate. For example, with the Bushmen, land descended in the paternal line; Dr. Bleek's informant occupied the site held by his father's father, which had descended first to his father, then to his elder brother, and finally to himself.¹ By such an arrangement sisters are separated, brothers and their descendants are united, at least through their property rights. In the permanent villages of the Hupa men were born, lived, and died in the same village, while women followed their husbands.² The paternal line of village mates was thus inevitably stressed while the offspring of sisters were scattered over different localities.

In recent years no one has emphasized the significance of such conditions for social organization more vigorously than Professor Speck. In the northeastern Algonkian region he finds non-exogamous groups transmitting hunting territories quite definitely from father to son and following patrilocal residence rules; brothers to some extent share economic privileges.³ Given such customs, it will not matter whether through the levirate and sororate all parallel cousins are addressed as brothers and sisters. Those parallel cousins who live together and share the same hunting prerogatives, *i. e.*, the children of brothers, will be automatically set apart from the children of sisters and come to be considered as in some respects more closely related. I regard Dr. Speck's data as most important in demonstrating what is to all intents and purposes a nascent father-sib. The external details of the processes involved may of course vary. For example, in the region of the northwest Amazons, the social unit is the exogamous house community of as many as two hundred individuals. Residence is patrilocal so that brothers take their wives to the same house. This sets up the same differ-

¹ W. H. I. Bleek and L. C. Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (London, 1911), pp. 305-307.

² P. E. Goddard, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

³ Frank G. Speck, Kinship Terms and the Family Band among the Northeastern Algonkians, *American Anthropologist*, N. S., vol. 20, 1918, p. 143 *seq.*; *id.*, Family Hunting Territories, *Memoir* 70, 1915, *Canadian Geological Survey*.

ence as among the Algonkian between the two kinds of parallel cousins, and here we have the interesting phenomenon that marriage with parallel cousins from other households, *i. e.*, unions between the children of sisters, are permitted.¹

In considering matrilineal societies Tylor was inclined to derive their essential features from the basic fact of matrilocal residence.² This is a luminous suggestion, for from matrilocal residence the segregation of matrilineal kin logically follows, as does the exceptional status of the maternal uncle. Nevertheless a serious obstacle to this interpretation as a general theory of the origin of mother-sibs lies in the restricted distribution of matrilocal residence even where descent is matrilineal. The Australians are practically all patrilocal, the Melanesians predominantly so, and some matronymic tribes in both Africa and America likewise have the wife living with her husband. There is the additional difficulty that residence very often is only temporarily with the wife's parents, in which case it suggests not infrequently merely an obligation on the husband's part to serve for his wife in lieu or part payment of the bride-price. Evidently if a young couple only stay with the wife's parents for a year or two and then set up an independent household, the conditions for a matrilineal reckoning of kindred are not the same as among the Hopi or Zuñi, where women own the houses and their husbands permanently reside with them. This fundamental difference between permanently and temporarily matrilocal residence still further restricts the applicability of Tylor's theory. Nevertheless it may be accepted as admirably fitting the case of the Pueblo Indians, for as Professor Kroeber has shown the sum and substance of the Pueblo "matriarchate" lies in the female ownership of the houses.³

In attempting to supplement Tylor's explanation it seems to me that attention should be specially directed to economic conditions and the sexual differentiation of labor. Eduard Hahn has familiarized us with the distinct character of horticulture and ara-

¹ T. Whiffen, *The North-West Amazons*, pp. 63, 66 ff.

² E. Tylor, *op. cit.*, p. 258; *The Matriarchal Family System*, *Nineteenth Century*, vol. XL (1896), pp. 81-96.

³ A. L. Kroeber, *Zuñi Kin and Clan*, pp. 47 f., 89 f.

tory culture—the former being in the hands of the women, the latter belonging uniformly to the masculine domain. Does not this suggest an interpretation of the kind required? Unfortunately we often lack details as to the manner of tillage, but recent data on the Hidatsa seem extremely suggestive. Here gardens were tilled jointly by the women of the maternal family and descended in the maternal family.¹ That is to say, the female descendants of sisters were actually united by common property rights and association in economic activities. The fact that male descendants are not included in these labors does not seem to me fatal, for as soon as the joint tillers were differentiated by a name their infants would automatically share the same designation from birth. It is interesting to note that in this region there is no record of individual hunting prerogatives of the males to counterbalance these horticultural privileges of the women.

I realize that my hypothesis, even when joined to Tylor's, does not account for all the cases of matrilineal sibs in the world. The patrilocal and non-horticultural Australians and Northwest Coast Indians remain to be explained. Nevertheless matrilocality and the joint economic activities of women suffice to account for a majority of the known cases, and the residual phenomena might at least be approached from a similar point of view.

I assume, then, that bifurcation and age-stratification, which occur among many sibless tribes, are conditions antecedent to the sib organization but produce an alignment of kin approximating that of the Dakota-Iroquois nomenclatures. The levirate and sororate, while not indispensable, render it more probable that the first ascending generation should be designated after the normal sib fashion; and they may further bring about the usual grouping of cousins. But in order that sibs shall develop from such a terminology, it is inevitable that the children of brothers be differentiated from those of sisters. I follow Tylor in explaining part of the phenomena by patrilocal or matrilocality. Others seem intelligible from the sociological differentiation of the sexes and the consequent establishment of unilateral lines of descent.

¹ Gilbert L. Wilson, *Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians* (Minneapolis, 1917), pp. 9 f., 113 f.

When the sib has taken firm root, it is quite possible for it to react upon the kinship terminology. Not only may the kinship idea be extended to similarly named sibs of alien peoples, but the sib affiliation may even override the basic generation scheme, as among the Crow and Omaha. In these instances, too, it is desirable to view the facts in connection with associated cultural features. Even in such cases the terminology may sometimes result from concrete social arrangements involved in the sib organization rather than from the abstract concept of the sib. For example, the Hopi classification of the father's sister with all her female descendants through females simply groups under one head a series of house mates, which manifestly does not apply to the Crow or Hidatsa.

The present is not an historical paper but a sketch intended to stimulate historical studies. If the sib is later than the family, we cannot indefinitely postpone an inquiry into the conditions that have moulded the sib out of a prior family organization. This involves the demand that we must learn a great deal more about the social life of the loosely organized peoples. The social customs of these tribes are no more uniform than are the sib organizations of other tribes. Both must be studied intensively and with constant consideration of the concomitant cultural traits if we are ever to frame a satisfactory theory of the development of social organization.

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